

School Education and the Transformation of Traditional Knowledge Structures in Late Qing China: A Focus on Curriculum Design

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Abstract

The late Qing period (1840-1912) was a significant era of transition for Chinese society from traditional to modern forms. Following the Opium Wars, the Qing government was compelled to pay indemnities and open treaty ports. Concurrently, the influx of Western natural sciences impacted China, disrupting the Confucian ethical and moral foundations that shaped the traditional academic structures of late Qing China. Under the influence of the eastward spread of Western learning, the traditional knowledge framework, predominantly centered around the Confucian classics (jing) and historical texts (shi), encountered challenges from the introduction of Western knowledge systems, which categorized knowledge into disciplines. Western disciplines, introduced through the new school educational system, significantly reshaped and diversified the traditional Chinese knowledge structure by introducing new subjects and methods. This study investigates the curriculum design of late Qing schools through primary source analysis, focusing on how course subjects and examination questions organized and categorized Chinese and Western knowledge. How did knowledge education centered around Western 'disciplines' evolve during the late Qing period under the influence of the new school education system? How were categories of Western knowledge reasonably integrated into the traditional Chinese imperial examination system, which represented the traditional Chinese knowledge structure? Addressing these questions may reveal the historical trajectory of how the knowledge structure in late Qing China transformed and integrated into the modern knowledge system.

Keywords: Curriculum Design, Imperial Examination System, Knowledge Structure, School Education, Western Learning